



The Flaming Terrapin



At the Sign of
THE CUPID AND LION

POEMS

by Lady Margaret Sackville

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

by Roy Campbell

BLAKE AND MILTON

by Denis Saurat

MILTON THE MAN AND THE THINKER

by Denis Saurat

MEN SEEN

by Paul Rosenfeld

LITERARY STUDIES AND REVIEWS

by Richard Aldington

1924

The
Flaming
TERRAPIN

BY

Ror CAMPBELL



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I dedicate this book to

MARY

&

NATALIE CAMPBELL

The Flaming Terrapin



PART I

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

PART I

MATERNAL Earth stirs redly from beneath
Her blue sea-blanket and her quilt of sky,
A giant Anadyomene from the sheath
And chrysalis of darkness; till we spy
Her vast barbaric haunches, furred with trees,
Stretched on the continents, and see her hair
Combed in a surf of fire along the breeze
To curl about the dim sierras, where
Faint snow-peaks catch the sun's far-swivelled beams:
And, tinder to his rays, the mountain-streams
Kindle, and volleying with a thunder-stroke
Out of their roaring gullies, burst in smoke
To shred themselves as fine as women's hair,
And hoop gay rainbows on the sunlit air.
Winnowed by radiant eagles, in whose quills
Sing the swift gales, and on whose waving plumes
Flashing sunbeams ignite — the towering hills
Yearn to the sun, rending the misty fumes
That clogged their peaks, and from each glistening spire
Fling to the winds their rosy fleece of fire.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Far out to sea the gales with 'savage sweep
Churning the water, waken drowsy fins
Huge fishes to propel from monstrous sleep,
That spout their pride as the red day begins,
"We are the great volcanoes of the deep!"
Now up from the intense creative Earth
Spring her strong sons: the thunder of their mirth
Vibrates upon the shining rocks and spills
In floods of rolling music on the hills.
Action and flesh cohere in one clean fusion
Of force with form: the very ethers breed
Wild harmonies of song: the frailest reed
Holds shackled thunder in its heart's seclusion.
And every stone that lines my lonely way,
Sad tongueless nightingale without a wing,
Seems on the point of rising up to sing
And donning scarlet for its dusty grey!
How often have I lost this fervent mood,
And gone down dingy thoroughfares to brood
On evils like my own from day to day;
"Life is a dusty corridor," I say,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

"Shut at both ends." But far across the plain,
Old Ocean growls and tosses his grey mane,
Pawing the rocks in all his old unrest
Or lifting lazily on some white crest
His pale foam-feathers for the moon to burn —
Then to my veins I feel new sap return,
Strength tightens up my sinews long grown dull,
And in the old charred crater of the skull
Light strikes the slow somnambulistic mind
And sweeps her forth to ride the rushing wind,
And stamping on the hill-tops high in air,
To shake the golden bonfire of her hair.

This sudden strength that catches up men's souls
And rears them up like giants in the sky,
Giving them fins where the dark ocean rolls,
And wings of eagles when the whirlwinds fly,
Stands visible to me in its true self
(No spiritual essence or wing'd elf
Like Ariel on the empty winds to spin).
I see him as a mighty Terrapin,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Rafting whole islands on his stormy back,
Built of strong metals molten from the black
Roots of the inmost earth: a great machine,
Thoughtless and fearless, governing the clean
System of active things: the winds and currents
Are his primeval thoughts: the raging torrents
Are moods of his, and men who do great deeds
Are but the germs his awful fancy breeds.

For when the winds have ceased their ghostly speech
And the long waves roll moaning from the beach,
The Flaming Terrapin that towed the Ark
Rears up his hump of thunder on the dark,
And like a mountain, seamed with rocky scars,
Tufted with forests, barnacled with stars,
Crinkles white rings, as from its ancient sleep
Into a foam of life he wakes the Deep.
His was the crest that from the angry sky
Tore down the hail: he made the boulders fly
Like balls of paper, splintered icebergs, hurled
Lassoos of dismal smoke around the world,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And like a bunch of crisp and crackling straws,
Coughed the sharp lightning from his craggy jaws.
His was the eye that blinked beyond the hill
After the fury of the flood was done,
And breaching from the bottom, cold and still,
Leviathan reared up to greet the Sun.
Perched on the stars around him in the air,
White angels rinsed the moonlight from their hair,
And the drowned trees into new flowers unfurled
As it sank dreaming down upon the world.
As he rolled by, all evil things grew dim.
The Devil, who had scoffed, now slunk from him
And sat in Hell, dejected and alone,
Rasping starved teeth against an old dry bone.

Before the coral reared its sculptured fern
Or the pale shellfish, swinging in the waves
With pointed steeples, had begun to turn
The rocks to shadowy cities — from dark caves
The deep and drowsy poisons of the sea
Mixed their corrosive strength with horny stones,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And coaxed new substances from them to be
The ponderous material of his bones.
The waves by slow erosion did their part
Shaping his heavy bonework from the mass,
And in that pillared temple grew a heart
That branched with mighty veins, through which to
pass

His blood, that, filtering the tangled mesh,
Built walls of gristle, clogged each hollow gap
With concrete vigour, till through bone and flesh
Flowed the great currents of electric sap.
While thunder clanging from the cloudy rack
With elemental hammers fierce and red,
Tempered the heavy target of his back,
And forged the brazen anvil of his head.

Freed from the age-long agonies of birth
This living galleon oars himself along
And roars his triumph over all the earth
Until the sullen hills burst into song.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

His beauty makes a summer through the land,
And where he crawls upon the solid ground,
Gigantic flowers, exploding from the sand,
Spread fans of blinding colour all around.
His voice has roused the amorphous mud to life —
Dust thinks: and tired of spinning in the wind,
Stands up to be a man and feel the strife
Of brute-thoughts in the jungle of his mind.
Bellerophon, the primal cowboy, first
Heard that wild summons on the stillness burst,
As, from the dusty mesa leaping free,
He slewed his white-winged broncho out to sea,
And shaking loose his flaming coils of hair,
Shot whistling up the smooth blue roads of air:
As he rose up, the moon with slanted ray
Ruled for those rapid hoofs a shining way,
And streaming from their caves, the sirens came
Riding on seals to follow him: the flame
Of their moon-tinselled limbs had flushed the dim
Green depths, and as when winds in Autumn skim
Gold acres, rustling plume with fiery plume,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Their long hair flickered skyward in the gloom,
Tossed to the savage rhythms of their tune.
Till, far across the world, the rising moon
Heard, ghost-like, in the embered evening sky
Their singing fade into a husky sigh,
And splashed with stars and dashed with stinging spray
The dandy of the prairies rode away!
That voice on Samson's mighty sinews rang
As on a harp's tense chords: each fibre sang
In all his being: rippling their strings of fire,
His nerves and muscles, like a wondrous lyre,
Vibrated to that sound; and through his brain
Proud thoughts came surging in a gorgeous train.
He rose to action, slew the grumbling bear,
Hauled forth the flustered lion from its lair
And swung him yelping skyward by the tail:
Tigers he mauled, with tooth and ripping nail
Rending their straps of fire, and from his track
Slithering like quicksilver, pouring their black
And liquid coils before his pounding feet,
He drove the livid mambas of deceit.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Oppression like a starved hyæna, sneaked
From his loud steps: Tyranny, vulture-beaked,
Rose clapping iron wings, and in a cloud
Of smoke and terror, wove its own dark shroud,
As he strode by and in his tossing hair,
Rippled with sunshine, sang the morning air.

Like a great bell clanged in the winds of Time,
Linking the names of heroes chime by chime
That voice rolled on, and as it filled the night
Strong men rose up, thrilled with the huge delight
Of their own energy. Upon the snows
Of Ararat gigantic Noah rose,
Stiffened for fierce exertion, like the thong
That strings a bow before its arrow strong
Sings on the wind; and from his great fists hurled
Red thunderbolts to purify the world.

The Flaming Terrapin



PART II

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

PART II

WHEN Noah thundered with his monstrous axe
In the primeval forest, and his boys,
Shaping the timbers, curved their gristled backs,
The ranges rocked and rumbled with the noise.
And as the trees came crashing down lengthwise,
And sprayed their flustered birds into the skies,
That plumed confetti, soaring far and frail,
With such a feathered glory strewed the gale,
That to the firmament they reared a new
But brighter galaxy: and as they flew,
Their rolling pinions, whistlingly aflame,
Kindled in flame and music on the air.
Then, like a comet, the pale Phoenix rose
Blazing above the white star-tusking snows,
And smouldering from her tail, a long white fume
Followed that feathered rocket through the gloom.
To the scared nations, volleying through the calm,
Her phantom was a signal of alarm,
And mustering their herds in frenzied haste,
They rolled in dusty hordes across the waste.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Far in the clouds her fatal meteor shone,
Swelling the turmoil as she hurtled on
Presaging ruin. In his mane of gold
The flaming lion trembled to behold:
And the fierce buffaloes who scorn control
Hushed up the thunder of their hoofs and stole
Like shadows from the plain. Through brakes and
 thorns

Crashed the wild antelopes with slanted horns:
And tigers, scrawled with fierce electric rays,
Livid with terror, slunk into the haze.

Skittles to Noah's axe, the great trunks sprawled,
And with the weight of their own bodies hauled
Their screaming roots from earth: their tall green
 towers

Tilted, and at a sudden crack came down
With roaring cataracts of leaves and flowers
To crush themselves upon the rocks, and drown
The earth for acres in their leafy flood;
Heaped up and gashed and toppled in the mud,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Their coloured fruits poured forth their juicy gore
To make sweet shambles of the grassy floor.

When star by star, above the vaulted hill,
The sky poured out its hoarded bins of gold,
Night stooped upon the mountain-tops, and still
Those low concussions from the forest rolled,
And still more fiercely hounded by their dread
Lost in the wastes the savage tribesmen fled.

Out of its orbit sags the cratered sun
And strews its last red cinders on the land,
The hurricanes of chaos have begun
To buzz like hornets on the shifting sand.
Across the swamp the surly day goes down,
Voracious insects rise on wings that drone,
Stormed in a fog to where the mountains frown,
Locked in their tetanous agonies of stone.
The cold and plaintive jackals of the wind
Whine on the great waste levels of the sea,
And like a leper, faint and tatter-skinned,
The wan moon makes a ghost of every tree.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The Ark is launched; cupped by the streaming
breeze,
The stiff sails tug the long reluctant keel,
And Noah, spattered by the rising seas,
Stands with his great fist fastened to the wheel.
Like driven clouds, the waves went rustling by,
Feathered and fanned across their liquid sky,
And, like those waves, the clouds in silver bars
Creamed on the scattered shingle of the stars.
All night he watched black water coil and burn,
And the white wake of phosphorus astern
Lit up the sails and made the lanterns dim,
Until it seemed the whole sea burned for him;
Beside the keel he saw the grey sharks move,
And the long lines of fire their fins would groove
Seemed each a ghost that followed in its sleep
Those long phantasmal coffins of the deep;
And in that death-light, as the long swell rolled,
The tarpon was a thunderbolt of gold.
Then in the long night-watches he would hear
The whinnying stallions of the wind career.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And to their lost companions, in their flight,
Whine like forlorn cicalas through the night.

By day the sky put on a peacock dress,
And, from its far bewildering recess,
Snowed its white birds about the rolling hull —
The swift sea-swallow and the veering gull
Mixed in a mist of circling wings, whose swoops
Haloed her with a thousand silver hoops;
And from the blue waves, startled in a swarm,
On sunlit wings, butterflies of the storm!
The flying-fishes in their silver mail
Rose up like stars, and pattered down like hail,
While the blunt whale, ponderous in his glee,
Churned his broad flukes and siphoned up the sea,
And through it, as the creamy circles spread,
Heaved the superb Olympus of his head.

Then far away, all in a curve of gold,
Flounced round with spray and frilled with curling
foam,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Cleaving the ocean's flatness with its bold
Ridges of glory, rose a towering dome
As the great Terrapin, bulking on high,
Spread forth his huge dimensions on the sky.
Not even Teneriffe, that awful dyke,
When the sun strikes him silver to the spike,
Sends such a glory through his cloudy spray
As did the Flaming Terrapin that day,
Rushing to meet the Ark; with such a sweep
The blue Zambezi rumbles to the deep,
With such a roar white avalanches slide
To strip whole forests from a mountain's side.
But Noah drew his blunt stone anchor in
And heaved it at him; with a thund'rous din
The stony fluke impaled the brazen shell
And set it clanging like a surly bell.
Its impact woke the looped and lazy chain
And rattling swiftly out across the main,
Drawn by the anchor from its dark abode,
Into the light that glittering serpent flowed

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Chafing the waves: then as a mustang colt,
Feeling the snaffle, lurches for a bolt —
With such a lurch, with such a frantic rear,
The Ark lunged forward on her mad career,
And the old Captain, with a grip of steel,
Laid his brown hands once more upon the wheel,
Bidding his joyous pilot haul him free
From the dead earth to dare the living sea!
Rowelled by that sharp prow to hissing hate,
The waves washed round her in a dreary spate,
And, as she passed, with slow vindictive swoop
Swerved in to gnash their teeth against the poop:
But like torn Hectors at the chariot wheel,
She dragged their mangled ruins with her keel:
Till puffed by growing rage to greater height,
Their foamy summits towered into the night
So steeply, that it seemed by God's decree
The Alps had all gone marching on the sea,
Or Andes had been liquefied and rolled
Their moonlit ridges in a surf of gold!

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

O, there were demons in the wind, whose feet,
Striding the foam, were clawed with stinging sleet:
They rolled their eyes and lashed their scorpion tails
And ripped long stripes into the shrieking sails.
High on the poop the dim red lantern glowed,
And soaring in the night, the pale ship rode:
Her shadow smeared the white moon black: her spars
Round wild horizons buffeted the stars,
As through the waves, with icicles for teeth,
She gored huge tunnels, through whose gloom to flee,
And down upon the crackling hull beneath
Toppled the white sierras of the sea!

On fiery Coloradoes she was hurled,
And where gaunt canyons swallowed up the light,
Down from the blazing daylight of the world,
She plunged into the corridors of night
Through gorges vast, between whose giant ribs
Of shadowing rock, the flood so darkly ran
That glimpses of the sky were feeble squibs
And faint blue powders flashing in the pan

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Of that grim barrel, through whose craggy bore
The steam compelled her with explosive roar,
Until once more she burst as from a gun
Into the setting splendour of the sun:
Down unimagined Congos proudly riding,
Buoyed on whose flow through many a grey lagoon,
The husks of sleepy crocodiles went sliding
Like piles of floating lumber in the moon;
Then with the giddiness of her speed elate,
With sails spread like the gold wings of a moth,
Down the black Amazon, cresting the spate,
The smooth keel slithered on the rustling froth:
She moved like moonlight through the awful
 woods,
And though the thunder hammered on his gong,
Half-dreaming, as beneath their frail white hoods
Sail the swift Nautili, she skimmed along—
Till, rafted by the forest, through whose thatch
The moon had struck its faint and ghostly match,
She saw the monsters that the jungle breeds—
Terrific larvæ crawled among the weeds

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And from the fetid broth like horrid trees
Wavered their forked antennæ on the breeze,
And panthers' eyes, with chill and spectral stare,
Flashed their pale sulphur on the sunless air:
While phosphorescent flowers across the haze,
Like searchlights darted faint unearthly rays:
And gleaming serpents, shot with gold and pearl,
Poured out, as softly as a smoke might curl,
Their stealthy coils into that spectral light
There to lie curved in sleep, or taking flight,
Trundle their burnished hoops across the leaves,
Till the stream, casting wide its forest sleeves,
Heaved out its broad blue chest against the sea,
And from their leafy bondage they were free.

Round the spiked islands, where the wild clouds scale
Flamboyant peaks, and fragrant meadows sweep,
A surf of roses roaring in the gale,
Down to the tufted shingles of the deep,
She passed, and squadrons of huge scarlet crabs
Scampered across the fringes of the land —

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Some were as vast as the gnarled baobabs
That hook clawed roots into the desert sand.
There, where the Cyclops herds the mastodon
The sombre crags with lurid splendour shone,
As like a lighthouse towering on the sky,
He rolled the fiery cartwheel of his eye.
On the far headlands, chaired on heaps of bones,
Cannibal kings sat charcoaled on the light,
Till the ship passed, and from their reeking thrones,
They leapt to their canoes in craven flight,
And their slim keels like horses bounded free
To leap the foamy hurdles of the sea:
Like plunging hoofs their paddles spurned the foam,
And, as they rose to crest each frothing comb,
And swung wave-lifted in the whistling air,
The gusty moonlight smouldered on their hair.

Round the stark Horn with buckled masts she clove,
Round the lean fore-arm of the World she drove.
Round the stark Horn, the lupanar of Death,
Where she and that fierce Lesbian, the Typhoon,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Roll smoking in the blizzard's frosty breath,
While, like a skinny cockroach, the faint moon
Crawls on their tattered blanket, whose dark woof
Of knitted cloud shrouds their dread dalliance, proof
To the white archery of the sun, and those
Thin javelins that cold Orion throws.
Round the stark Horn, where bleak and stiffly lined,
Hooked ridges form a cauldron for the wind,
And droning endless tunes, that gloomy sprite
Stoops to his dismal cookery all night,
And with his giant ladle skims the froth,
Boiling up icebergs in the stormy broth,
Brewing the spirits that in sinking ships
Drowned sailors tipple with their clammy lips.

The hurricanes are out! — the whole night long
Humming the cradle-song that lulls the dead,
Where rolling stiffly in a silent throng
Their waif-like corpses on a stormy bed
Toss in their deep deliriums, or sleep,
Lifting pale faces from their restless grave.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Only to sink into a trance more deep
As they loll back upon the pillowing wave.
Sailors, so still? — See where the water pales
To milky froth before the whistling gales,
Hear the shrill song, where brawling out of Hell,
Those savage song-birds come to ring your knell,
Hear the low moan, where thunder bursting free,
Mourns for the great tanned nurslings of the sea!
Papooses of the storm! The grey tides lead
Your savage orphaned souls to rest, and thin
Your voices to the rustling of a reed,
Your flesh to vapour, and your horny skin
To spider-threads — and still you lie and dream!
Though the mad hurricanes around you scream,
Twitter and moan, so shrill and piercing-sweet,
That in His stormy turret on the Moon
God even feels His starry rafters beat
Time to the rhythms of the dismal rune
That those ferocious nightingales repeat.
Its four sad candles dripping from their wicks,
The Southern Cross disconsolately swung,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And canted low its splintered crucifix,
While all around the wolfish winds gave tongue,
And, in the silence of the nether shore,
With hateful patience by the hunted ship,
Their slitting fangs and feet that leave no spoor
Raced all night long in drear companionship,
Till, through the shadows of the Southern floe,
The awful ghost of Erebus at last
Flowered in the desolation of the snow,
Curling his fiery tresses on the blast:
And the red plumes that rustle in his crest
Tinged the pale icebergs as they loomed abreast
And faintly in the Night's funereal noon
Reared their immense tiaras to the moon:
As they drew near, they hit the dazzled sight
Like ships on fire, and stacked with flaming
spears
Old Ocean shone, as swaying through the Night
He rafted up his monstrous chandeliers.
The wild Antarctic lights, ablaze on high,
Rippled their feathered glories up the sky;

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

As if a phœnix, moulting plume from plume,
Sprinkled his fading splendours on the gloom,
Zigzags of scarlet, combs of silver flame,
Shivering on the darkness, went and came,
And fifty hues, in fierce collision hurled,
Blazed on the hushed amazement of the world!

The Flaming Terrapin



PART III

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

PART III

NOW low along the skyline, furred and shagged
As bears, dense clouds in slow contortions
dragged

Ponderous bodies, and with clumsy stoop
Came shambling skyward in a sombre troop:
Like quarries shattered out of cliffs, their chaps,
Crammed with resounding cordite, from deep gaps
Exploded thunder, and with jagged spark
Flashed fangs of deathly pallor on the dark.
Drilled by the level sleet, and lashed with spray,
Confounded in the gloom the sailors lay,
Or huddled on the deck their watches kept
Until they whined for sleep: and if they slept,
Sleep was a long dark tunnel demon-scooped
Out of the Night's black rock, in which were
grouped

Huge grizzled bats, so aged and so thin
That, as with fruit parched in its wrinkled skin,
About the shrunk pulp of their bodies clung
A loose grey pouch of fur, and as they swung,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Like pennies in a beggar's greasy purse
Their dry bones jingled: and their blood-shot eyes,
The only light, winked redly to disperse
Lank shadows, which the canted stalagmites
Flung forward, dull as falling logs, to fade
Tapering on into the gloom, or rise
Up half-lit walls that lost themselves in shade.

They mourned dead summers: faint remembered
 flowers
With ghosts of scent and colour filled their hours,
As like poor skeletons, whiskered and lean,
They crouched and prayed for death to intervene:
But life, a scorpion with tenacious hold,
Fastened upon their spirits with the cold
Relentless threat of its infinitude —
And though in that one thought the world seclude
Its fairest hopes, the sense of dying men
Invests it with a nameless horror, when
With sight unveiled and sure untingling ear,
Their souls reach out beyond the grave to hear

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The whisper of the sea that has no shore.
And all around them as the grim night wore,
The fury of the tempest grew more blind —
Up in the shrouds the whanging of the wind
Wrung from the soulless metal of the wire
A shriek of agony: a sighing fire
Feathered the yards; like devil-rattled dice
Their cold bones shivered, and their fearful wails
Mixed with the hollow grinding of the ice
Above the slatted thunder of the sails.

There in the Night against whose stormy womb
A nameless cape, reared up into the gloom,
With cloudy sperm engendered ghastly forms,
Dread embryos of hurricanes and storms —
Coasting the snows they heard as in a dream
The death-cry and the agony supreme
Of the slow-drowning world. On tongues of flame
Out of the throat of Erebus it came
Drawn through the craggy windpipe of the world:
There where red lava, in Lofodens swirled,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Had funnelled to the sky its stormy flue
The death gasp of the world came smoking
through,
And on the sky's cold glass, frostily strewn,
Lay smeared in phthisic pallor round the moon.
In that great sigh the voices of the world
As in a shroud of ghostly sound were furled.
The souls of Nations, tossed like stormy trees,
With groans and heavy thunder filled the breeze,
And as each race, in travail with its doom,
Sent forth its hollow voice into the gloom,
The flying winds its faint, sad rumour bore
Till all was heard along that dismal shore.
Anarchy, jolted in a rattling car,
Crested the turrets of the storm, and plied
His crackling whip with forked lash to scar
Red weals across the gloom: with frantic stride
His gusty stallions clenched their bits and tore
His whirling spokes along the pitchy rack:
Their gaping nostrils drizzled foam and gore,
And where they passed the gurdy sea grew black

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Revolving up in mighty colonnades,
Thick maelstroms propped the dense and sagging
shades

With pillared thunder, and with hideous twist,
Corkscrewed by whirlwinds, writhed athwart the mist.

But when their stormy pilot, through the spray,
Like a great ship churning a giant screw,
Rose tilting o'er the waves and thrashed his way
Across the grumbling sea, the weary crew
Forgot their pain and through that night of fear
Sang as they followed in his swift career,
Purged by their agonies of all the dross
Of fear and sloth, their spirits shed their gross
Rags of despair, and as in spangled pride
A python ripples from his shrivelled hide
To ride propelled on wheels of rolling fire,
Their souls emerging from their old attire
Glittered new-sheathed, as if in shining mail,
Steadfast through all the terrors of the gale.
Like moonlight the new splendour of their minds

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Flushed their clean limbs: beauty ran all aflame
Through nerve and bone, and whistled in the winds
Threading the burning fibres of their hair.
Fit men they seemed in vigour, brain, and blood,
To mend the swamping havoc of the Flood,
To breed great races and in pride to reign
Throned in the flowering cities of the plain.

But in their absence from the drowning earth,
The sooty Fiend, deep in his mirky firth
Of smoke, upon his throne of roasted bricks,
Bawled his fell triumph far along the Styx,
And Cerberus, his lean three-headed tyke,
Howled his response far down the surly dyke.
Around him then he gathered all his court —
Goblins and apes and elves of every sort.
Huge carrion crows came rasping rusty jaws
Hoarse as the friction of a hundred saws:
Toads pranced about him on their nimble shins
While others sawed their creaking violins:
Gaunt poetesses, shrieking of their sins,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Fresh from the world's asylums, like a rout
Of cackling turkeys, hedged him round about:
While lousy toucans, clanking hollow bills,
Sounded him on, as he bestrode the hills.

Towering like a steeple through the air
He stalks: the cascades of his molten hair
With streams of lava wash his ebon limbs:
His eyes, like wheels of fire with whirling rims,
Revolve in his gaunt skull, from which a tusk
Curves round his ear and glitters in the dusk.
Now he comes prowling on the ravaged earth,
He whores with Nature, and she brings to birth
Monsters perverse, and fosters feeble minds,
Nourishing them on stench such as winds
Lift up from rotting whales. On earth again
Foul Mediocrity begins his reign:
All day, all night God stares across the curled
Rim of the vast abyss upon the world:
All night, all day the world with eyes as dim
Gazes as fatuously back at him.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

He does not hear the forests when they roar
Some second purging deluge to implore,
When cities from his ancient rule revolt,
He grasps, but dares not wield, his thunderbolt.
Sodom, rebuilt, scorns the wilting power
That once played skittles with her tallest tower.
Each Nation's banner, like a stinking clout,
Infecting Earth's four winds, flaunts redly out,
Dyed with the bloody issues of a war,
For hordes of cheering victims to adore.
While old Plutocracy on gouty feet
Limps like a great splay camel down the street;
And patriotism, Satan's angry son,
Rasps on the trigger of his rusty gun,
While priests and churchmen, heedless of the
 strife,
Find remedy in thoughts of after-life;
Had they nine lives, O muddled and perplexed,
They'd waste each one in thinking of the next!
Contentment, like an eating slow disease,
Settles upon them, fetters hands and knees:

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

While pale Corruption, round his ghastly form
Folding the cloudy terrors of the storm,
His shapeless spectre smothered in the blending
Of heavy fumes, o'er mirky towns descending,
Swims through the reek, with movements as of one
Who, diving after pearls, down from the sun
Along the shaft of his own shadow slides
With knife in grinning jaws: and as he glides,
Nearing the twilight of the nether sands,
Under him swings his body deft and slow,
Gathers his knees up, reaches down his hands
And settles on his shadow like a crow.
So dread Corruption, over human shoals,
Instead of pearls, comes groping after souls,
And the pure pearl of many a noble life
Falls to the scraping of his rusty knife.
Till glutted with his spoil, like some huge squid,
He reascends, in smeary vapours hid,
And, like those awful nightmares of the deep
When through the gloom propelled with backward
sweep

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Out of their mirky bowels they discharge
The dark hydraulic jet that moves their large
Unwieldy trunks — back to his secret lair
He welters through the dense miasmal air
In inky vapours cloaking his retreat:
Ever-renewed, his soft and sucking feet
Break from his trunk, and wandering alone,
Grow into forms as ghastly as his own:
Which, in their turn, with equal vigour breed
And through the world disseminate his seed,
Till over every city, grim and vast,
The shadow of a brooding death is cast.

Amphion, whose music planted massive towers
And temples propped on cylinders of stone,
Seems to have risen to this world of ours,
Renounced his lyre, and now to dotage grown,
Across the world in pied pyjamas goes
Fluting a leaky bagpipe with his nose.
A merry piper! Let his flutings rear
New slums and brothels year on dismal year —

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Houses where Sickness, wrapped in clogging mist,
Clenches pale children in his bony fist,
And as he sucks his lean and hairy paws,
Slamming the huge portcullis of his jaws,
Enormous lice, like tiger, hog, and bear,
Go crashing in the jungles of his hair.
Let him build ships and muzzle them with dread
To carry death where they might carry bread,
And forge those iron fish, that from their decks,
They launch with thunder bottled in their necks
To strew the waves with limbs of mangled crews.
Let squinting guns command the fairest views,
And giant mills, the temples of despair,
Reared to dull Vulcan and to brutish Mars,
Wolfing huge coals with iron jaws aflare,
Roll their grim smoke to choke the trembling stars!

Youth of the world! pale lichens crawl apace
On Earth's fair limbs and cloud her shining face:
We lie in graves and dungeons and our chains
Are naught but our own sluggard nerves and veins!

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

See where the Ark, bearded with frost, rolls home,
Her faded ensign trailing in the foam,
Her fiery pilot, with his crest aflame,
Roars out his triumph on the morning air
Rending the gloom: fire-purpled clouds unroll
Their crimson banners round the stormy Pole!

The Flaming Terrapin



PART IV

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

PART IV

THOUGH reared me up to perch upon a crag
That, crooked in heaven like an evil snag,
Shipwrecked the soaring stars, and there I saw,
Clenching his tail within his foamy jaw,
The Kraken, Time, convolved in scaly fold,
Hug the round Earth and girdle her with gold.
Huge throes ran through his equatorial coil,
His spangles, as when water mixed with oil
Whorls rainbows, all disintegrating, swirled
Their violent colours, as whose flames unfurled,
Rippling his scales, all through him seemed to run
A thousand fiery serpents writhed in one,
While future ages rolled into my sight
Spreading prophetic visions on the night.

Far be the bookish Muses! Let them find
Poets more spruce, and with pale fingers wind
The bays in garlands for their northern kind.
My task demands a virgin muse to string
A lyre of savage thunder as I sing.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

You who sit brooding on the crags alone,
Nourished on sunlight in a world of stone,
Muse of the Berg, muse of the sounding rocks
Where old Zambezi shakes his hoary locks,
And as they tremble to his awful nod,
Thunder proclaims the presence of a god!
You who have heard with me, when daylight
drops,

Those gaunt muezzins of the mountain-tops,
The grey baboons, salute the rising moon
And watched with me the long horizons swoon
In twilight, when the lorn hyæna's strain
Reared to the clouds its lonely tower of pain.
Now while across the night with dismal hum
The hurricanes, your meistersingers, come,
Choose me some lonely hill-top in the range
To be my Helicon, and let me change
This too-frequented Hippocrene for one
That thunders flashing to my native sun
Or in the night hushes his waves to hear
How, armed and crested with a sable plume,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Like a dark cloud, clashing a ghostly spear,
The shade of Tchaka strides across the gloom.
Write what I sing in red corroding flame,
Let it be hurled in thunder on the dark,
And as the vast earth trembles through its frame,
Salute with me the advent of the Ark!

Now from their frosty fetters bursting free,
To dare once more the terrors of the sea,
The Ark and her grim pilot churned the foam,
Crested the waves, and hoisted sail for home.
Fierce currents trailed her in their rustling train,
Swishing their silver skirts along the main,
And the grim night, as like proud queens they swayed,
Re-echoed with the great frou-frou they made.
Northward she seethed before the rising gales,
And with the starlight frosted on her sails,
Forth, like a shivering marshfire, flew to skim
With dancing flame the far horizon's rim.

Till in the growing light, tufting the grey
Blank levels with a mead of flowery spray,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The sirens like a sheaf of lilies sprang,
Streaking the depths with faint and snowy limbs,
And in pale constellations, moved and sang
Buoyed on the cadence of their own shrill hymns:
And as the spheres through level ether, bowled
By their own music, chime with tongues of gold —
So to their harmonies the sirens moved
And through the tide their shining orbits grooved.
From their red lips forth rippled on the air
Visible music: shapes with tossing hair
Skipped on the winds, and with a ringing cry,
Rolled in harmonious battle down the sky.
Their tongues like silver hammers beat the air
To crystal armour for those shapes to wear:
Out of each dusty mouthful of the wind
Their throats with vibrant shuttles wove and twined
Glittering robes, by vocal magic wrought
To clothe those airy phantoms of their thought.
And the pale squadrons, clashing through the
 mists,
Tilted by starlight in their windy lists,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Till every one was slain, and the last white
Lingering singer slithered out of sight,
And trailing white foam-roses in her curls,
Sank wavering down to dream among the pearls.
The winds died down: but music filled the sails
With all the speed and beauty of the gales,
And like a nun with twilight-slippered feet,
Sighed on beside the Ark: sounding more sweet
As faintlier it passed, her ghostly tread
Smoothed the untroubled sea, and carpeted
The level mirrors with reflected stars
That floated there like huge white nenuphars.
While dying echoes, leaning to the sail,
Shouldered her onward through the twilight pale.

Cleaving the deep, that miracle of ships,
As smoothly as a psalm divides the lips,
Passed on her way: and still beneath her drawn
Her pale reflection moved, as when the Dawn,
Across the Ocean's polished floors of gloom,
Sweeps her faint shadow with a golden broom.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Smooth as a lover's hand, ere sleep, may slide
O'er the gold sunburn of a woman's side
To drain the moonlight smouldering from her hair—
She stroked the water with her keel, and where
She passed along, it silvered into foam
And burned to take her roving beauty home.
She, whose white form had been the splendid theme
Of chanting hurricanes in their supreme
And wildest inspiration: she, whose white
Virginity appeased the lust of Night,
When in his star-slung hammock, worked with red
Stitches of lightning as with scarlet thread,
She swayed to his embraces as she lay
Dandled in thunder, cosseted in spray!
Now from his couch of terrors borne apart,
She glides alone; the silence on her heart
Weighs down with all the precious weight of gold,
While through the shades, serene and chaste and
cold,
She rears aloft her moon-emboldened form,
With child of high endeavour by the Storm.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

New signals greeted now the flying ship,
Like lambs the merry waves were seen to skip,
As shepherd winds drove forth their foamy sheep
To rustle through the verdure of the deep:
No more the cruising shark with whispers thin
Through their crisp fleeces sheared his sickle fin
Beside the keel, portending death and woe:
But joyful omens in unceasing flow
Saluted her, as racing with the gales,
She rolled escorted by the rolling whales.

Now far along the skyline, like a white
Signal of triumph through the muffled light,
An Albatross, wheeling in awful rings,
Spanned the serene horizon with his wings,
And towering upward on his scythes of fire,
Smote the thick air, that, strung with beams of light,
Clanged to his harpings like a smitten lyre
Tolling the solemn death-knell of the Night.
Till, rearing higher, he caught the blinding glow
Of sunlight frozen in his plumes of snow,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

As his ethereal silver soared to fade
Into the light its own white wings had made.
And, fusing slowly, Albatross and sun
Mingled their two faint radiances in one.

The tranced crew hailed with a thrilling cry
That snowy sign: but hardly had the sigh
Of the last echo died, when on their sight
Dawned a vast Presence, reddening the Night,
As the old Dragon, from his native slime,
Leviathan, the eldest child of Time,
Projected his gaunt skull upon the gloom,
In tones of thunder prophesying doom.
The blood-red ridges of his drooping gills
Arched the horizon like a range of hills:
In fiery whirlpools, glaring on the skies,
Through blood and foam he churned his rolling eyes
And ruled their long blue rays across the dark
To fix in pallid focus on the Ark.
The sails lit up: the long illumined hull,
Polished with fire, shone like a naked skull,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And the whole ship, in bridal white arrayed,
Stood chiselled out in flame against the shade.

Then the old Serpent, with a voice that fell
Loud as the hammer of a groaning bell
That rocks a steeple — launched its fatal cry
Hounding the laden echoes through the sky:
“Yawn, you great gaps: you starred abysses yawn
To swill the fiery vintage of the Dawn:
Nature’s grim forces heavy with their sleep
Rise up in red rebellion from the deep:
And strong, chained thunders, rifting stone from stone,
Surge underground with subterraneous moan:
Volcanoes, in eruption loud and dire,
Sprawl on the Night with baobabs of fire
And writhe their horrid branches to the Moon
With crackling din. Hark how the shrill Typhoon
Skirts in the towers of Sodom like a cricket
Fiddling her death-dance: splintered like a wicket,
Tall Babel crumples up! The gaunt abyss
Sucks in the darkness with a mournful hiss

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Gaping for hunger: swirling in its throat
The shadows of a stormy whirlpool float.
Let old Corruption on his spangled throne
Tremble to hear! The jagged rifts of stone
Roar for his mangled carrion: old Earth
Writhes in the anguish of a second birth,
And now casts off her shrivelled hide, to be
The sun's fair bride, as bright and pure as he!
Fleeced like a god in rosy curls of fire
With massive limbs, stiffened by fierce desire,
He leaps, and as she yields her golden thigh,
Gigantic copulations shake the sky!
Old Noah's sons, in pomp and princely pride,
Through all the gardens of the world will ride,
And steeped cities stun the hollow sky
With thunderclaps of bells as they go by,
While at their sides, their stately wives shall
pass
Like rays of moonlight on the waving grass,
With flowers twined and scarlet plumes aflame
Like rockets in the midnight of their hair!"

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

He spoke and sank; and as a cauldron boils
The sea, drawn downward in his horrid coils,
Funnelled a gloomy whirlpit, till the world
Of waters on a single pivot swirled,
And, slowly slackening, once more untwined
Its foamy rings, and rolled before the wind;
But not for long, for the fierce Terrapin,
With one sharp wrench had snapped the linking
cable

And sounded downwards: with a rending din
Half the flat Ocean, tilting like a table,
Rose in a wave, whose long white foamy lip
Slobbered the stars with froth, and sucked the ship
Heavenward on its hoary-whiskered rim.
Dizzy she soared that foaming ridge to skim,
And as a top, whipped into frantic pain,
Scribbles the dust, so on the boiling main
She swirled and eddied: till the snowy crest
Rearing her like the star that gilds the west,
High as the clouds, sank with a strident roar
To strand her on the far, the promised shore!

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

So a fierce mænad, all her rites performed,
From where among the woods she raved and stormed,
Comes panting, as her frenzy fades away,
To lie sleep-tousled on the moonlit hay.
The dauntless crew, turbulent in their mirth,
Sprang from the decks to stamp the solid earth,
Calling their wives: and as those stately girls
Up from the hatches, wreathed in glimmering curls,
Set foot upon the shore, a sudden surf
Of flowers foamed up to canopy the turf:
They strayed the fields, among the flowers they rolled
Like plundering bees, dabbled with dusty gold,
And watched the light, which, trembling as it grew,
Up through the clouds on silver pinions flew.

But the old Terrapin, freed from his load,
On sterner Errands took his lonely road
Over far continents. All through the land
His breath in cyclones pillared up the sand
And drove it on before him. In his ire
He spewed up thunder, and like slots of fire

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The loopholed sockets of his eyes betrayed
Their gun-like pupils, as they smeared the shade
With clouds of pitch, and forking through the haze,
Riddled the gloom with fierce electric rays.
Before him floundered havoc, but behind,
Flowers with their scented tassels beat the wind:
After the winter of his wrath he led
A soft atoning Spring and from the red
Cinders he spread before him, as she passed,
Petals and leaves unravelled on the blast,
And tossed their rosy curls like living things
Fanned by the glimmering rainbows of her wings.

As a fierce train, maned like a ramping lion
With smoke and fire, thunders on rolling iron
Pounding grim tunes, and grinds with flashing wheel
Rockets of flame from parallels of steel,
And, as the rails curve, shoots from flanks of brass
Tangents of fire to singe the whiskered grass —
So the mad Terrapin, with mighty shoulders
Shunting the hills, moved upon rolling boulders

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

That, like huge wheels, propelled with savage might,
Revolved their molten globes across the night.

Till far upon a mountain's twinkling spire,
He saw the Devil on his throne of fire
Ruling the world: and launched his fatal shock
Of thunder: as it leapt from rock to rock
Blackening the gulf beneath, and out behind
Its tattered fringes reddened on the wind,
The old Fiend heard it come, and pale with fear
Felt his harsh tresses writhe themselves and rear
Like shocks of wheat. Under his gaudy throne
Avernus yawned with hollow jaws of stone,
As like a skittle to the thunderclap
He sprawled far out into the windy gap,
And, on his baffled pinions loosely flung,
Down through the gloom in huge gyrations swung.
Like a stone toppled from an endless hill,
Compelled as by some fierce insensate will,
Colliding and rebounding from the crags,
Sheer through the deep he tore his whistling rags.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And while through those grim vaults and starless gaps
He rumbled in his hideous collapse,
The damned, each like a grey hook-tailed baboon,
Grown blind with yearning on the fruitless moon,
Hearing his fall, stole forth in rustling troops,
Crammed the cold ledges of the cliff that stoops
Bowed o'er the pit, and there with groping sight
Followed his sinking phantom through the night.
For weary months from cliff to crag he fell,
Until at last the grim recess of Hell,
Stunned by his fall, gave forth a horrid groan
From all its jolted battlements of stone.
And as he dragged his body from the flood,
Pocking deep craters in the sucking mud,
The Dead, like weary snipe, rising on high,
Whined through the gusty pallor of the sky,
And left him there, rending the night with moans,
To nurse the mangled relics of his bones.

After he sank, the clouds from soppy locks
Wrung their last tears, the slow descending dew,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The dawn put forth upon the eastern rocks
A milky thigh, and, donned a silver shoe,
And through the half-drawn curtains of the mist
Lingered and swayed, a frail somnambulist,
As in fair tresses, on the wind unfurled,
She trawled the rosy morning through the world.

The props of stone that carry the whole night
Upon their shoulders, when her pitchy crows
Perch with faint-spangled wings upon their white
Helmets of frost, and cling with gnarly toes
To their steep Krantzes—in that sudden blaze
Became red beacons, from whose palisade,
Hurled as by some huge fist across the haze,
The Sun burst upward like a red grenade!

The Flaming Terrapin



PART V

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

PART V

DOWN on their airy beds,
As the thin leaves fade on the willows,
The Stars, outwatched, upon cloudy pillows
Nuzzled their curly heads.
Feathering heaven with ripples of fire,
The birds stormed up to the sun's dominions,
And the tense air hummed like a silver lyre
To the stroke of their burning pinions.
Where Behemoth rolled on a river of gold,
Far down in the valleys below,
The lilies of Africa rustled and beat
Their giddy white flames with the whistle of sleet,
As they quilted the land with snow.

With the sun on their tansied hair,
And the wind in their scarlet quills,
White Seraphim rose aflare
From the tops of the snow-clad hills.
As a song on the strings of a lyre
Rolls and ripples and dances,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

As, surging through forests, a fire
Shaking its furious lances
Till the bare boughs crackle and twire,
On wheels of revolving smoke
In ruin advances —
So from the eastern skies they broke,
And with fierce tresses ablaze,
On billows of fire uprose
To riddle the gloom with the shafted rays
That they twanged from their golden bows.

From the blue vault, with rosy glow,
In shimmering descent,
Ten thousand angels fell like snow,
Ten thousand tumbling angels went
Careering on the winds, and hurled
Their flaming rainbows to lasso
The wild, unbroken world!
Saddled on shooting stars they flew
And rode them down with manes aflare,
Stampeding with a wild halloo,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Gymnastic on the rushing air.
Down on the hills, with a shatter of flame,
The topsy-turvy horsemen came,
The angel cowboys, flaring white,
With lariats twirling, cracking whips,
And long hair foaming in the light,
Vaulting on the saw-backed ridges
Where they tear the sky to strips,
And the rack of thunder bridges
Mountain-tops in dense eclipse:
And the raven clouds, in rout,
Fled like redly smoking ships,
The raven clouds, that with a shout,
Pelting flowers, they beat about
And hounded through the sky.
With ruin sagging from their spars,
Raked by the shrapnel of the stars,
Careering madly by
To roll, torpedoed by a blood-red moon,
Stark crazy on the blast of the typhoon.
And when the champions of the light

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

Had put their tattered sails to flight,
Star-high they hung above the cliffs suspended,
On scarlet plumes so fierce and splendid
That the sun's beams were turned to running
 springs
And rippled in the glory of their long spread wings.

Out 'of the Ark's grim hold
A torrent of splendour rolled —
From the hollow resounding sides,
Flashing and glittering, came
Panthers with sparkled hides,
And tigers scribbled with flame,
And lions in grisly trains
Cascading their golden manes.
They ramped in the morning light,
And over their stripes and stars
The sun-shot lightnings, quivering bright,
Rippled in zigzag bars.
The wildebeest frisked with the gale
On the crags of a hunchback mountain,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

With his heels in the clouds, he flirted his tail
Like the jet of a silvery fountain.
Frail oribi sailed with their golden-skinned
And feathery limbs laid light on the wind.
And the springbok bounced, and fluttered, and flew,
Hooping their spines on the gaunt karroo.
Grey zebras pranced and snorted aloud —
With the crackle of hail their hard hoofs pelt,
And thunder breaks from the rolling cloud
That they raise on the dusty Veldt.
O, hark how the rapids of the Congo
Are chanting their rolling strains,
And the sun-dappled herds a-skipping to the song, go
Kicking up the dust on the great, grey plains —
Tsessebe, Koodoo, Buffalo, Bongo,
With the fierce wind foaming in their manes.

The Flaming Terrapin



PART VI

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

PART VI

HIGH on the streams of ether, through the void
The angel riders of the air deployed
Their glittering files, as if in one hooped line
Of flame, the far horizons to confine,
And spin a running girdle round the earth —
A belt of fire, in whose expanding girth,
Struck by the sun with one white melting ray,
In all but hue, the ranks dissolved away:
And all their gorgeous dyes, diffusing through
Each other, slowly mingled and withdrew
Each draining from the glimmering maze its own
Soluble flame, in fluid ease alone
To glide in its own channel: till between
The gold and scarlet ribbons, ran the green,
And in one blaze of watery fire unfurled,
The Rainbow looped the mountains of the world.
Now the Earth meets the Sun: through nerve and limb
Trembling she feels his fiery manhood swim:
Huge spasms rend her, as in red desire
He leaps and fills her gushing womb with fire:

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And as he labours sounding through the skies
The thunders of their merriment arise!
Now each small seed, thrilled with their mighty
 lust,
Builds up its leafy palace out of dust
And through its rustling trellises, in springs
Of crystal light, the swift wind flows and sings:
Vibrant with life, each clod of turf, inspired,
Shoots forth a gorgeous flower as if it fired
A rocket at the sky. The steepled trees
Rocked with their great bells clanging in the Breeze
As she passed by with golden locks aswirl,
Of all earth's progeny the fairest girl!
In robes of rustling air she ran to play,
Tripping on trembling lilies all the way,
And the hushed Ocean, puckered into smiles,
Foamed at her feet around its shining isles:
And trees and mountains heard her joyful song
On plumes of towering eagles borne along,
And higher yet, where eagles fear to fly,
Banded by soaring echoes through the sky.

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

She slid with white feet planted in a shell
That smoothed the water with its whorled prow
Across the deep. Lorn as a midnight bell
Is the remembrance of her beauty now.
The sea's faint marble veined with green and gold
Framed her white image as she glided by:
The clouds, her hoarded fragrances to hold,
Spread seines of tasselled fire across the sky,
And a gay rainbow, curved to catch the pale
Rays of the morning, served her for a sail.

The Flaming Terrapin, his labours done,
Humped like a cloud o'er mountain, crag and field
Rose on the skyline. The far-shooting sun
Splintered its arrows on his fiery shield,
From whose bright dome in sudden ricochets
Recoiling flashed the long reflected rays:
While, rolling his red eyes, a double moon
That lit the hill-sides with a second noon,
He sank to rest: His golden ridges, tiered
Above the foam, now slowly disappeared:

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And as clouds roll immense and globed and still
To burst in thunder round a lonely hill,
The slow foam gathered round him: o'er his wild
Mountainous outline, ponderously piled,
It hung one moment, poised in grim suspense,
And then swamped crashing down, and from its
dense

Vortex of thunder, with a gradual sweep
Rolled forth in groaning circles on the deep:
Halo on halo, ring on gleaming ring,
Reached out, in long subsiding curves, to fling
The rude waves back and with a foamy crown
Proclaim the Monarch as he sounded down!
Back to the deep he sinks and in a proud
Disintegration like a raining cloud,
Reversing the grand process of his birth,
Returned his borrowed vigour to the Earth.
That vital fluid, straining through the pores
Of the vast ocean, on the wind upsoars
In rolling clouds that globe around the Sun,
Whence, rinsed as from his fiery curls, they run

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

In sparkling showers which, teeming in the Earth,
Rouse up the soil to energies of birth,
And shoot new vigour up through giant stems
Wider to spread their leafy diadems,
While from the glad red turf the eager grain
Springs dancing to the silver flutes of rain.
Thence into livelier forms his vigour swims
In fluid grace to beautify the limbs
Of swift wild creatures pasturing in herds,
Through whose lithe bodies, as they graze the
plain,
It flows like music — soaping into curds
Of froth along the Koodoo's gusty mane,
And slithering in the muscles of the Roan,
And in great Buffaloes, loading with stone
Their horny brows, as with resounding stride
And battering force, in one fierce shock that pulls
The screaming turf up, their huge forms collide
And thunder clothes the battle-angry bulls!
Feeding a myriad forms with life and light,
Speed for the race, and courage for the fight,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

His strength, like some huge stream, with swiftening
course

Pours through the races of the world its force,
Till its fierce currents, into flame refined,
Sweep to electrify the human mind,
And Man, triumphant, feels their strength and speed
Thrill through his frame as music through a reed.

Now by each silent pool and fringed lagoon
The faint flamingoes burn among the weeds:
And the green Evening, tended by the Moon,
Sprays her white egrets on the swinging reeds.
Her wings are spangled with the fiery grain
They winnow from the skies, and through the
night,
Shoot their soft rays to gild the glistening main:
The swift winds simmer in her ghostly light.
The miser, leaning o'er his greasy hoard,
Cannot her brighter alchemy resist:
The murderer has wiped his grisly sword,
The rusty carbine trembles in his fist;

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The trigger turns into a golden pin,
The barrel swings, a lily tall and frail,
And the dark soul, forgetful of his sin,
Walks singing through the terrors of the gale.
Under the feet of pale somnambulists
The thorns are turned to flowers gold and white:
Roses for those sad hunters of the mists
Flame in the secret gardens of the night.
Where each young Hercules, tired of the chase,
Has lain, the earth becomes a mass of flowers:
His pleated muscles and his burning face
Are sweeter to the earth than April showers,
And where he slept the flaming corn aspires
To harp the wind along on golden wires.

High on the top of Ararat alone
Old Noah stood: beneath him faintly blown,
Great aasvogels, like beetles on a pond,
Veered in slow circles o'er the gulf beyond.
The dusk came on: faint shades began to streak
Across the dim cathedral of the peak,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

And from his craggy pulpit, the baboon
Rose on the skyline, mitred with the moon.
Over far Edens waved the golden lights
Trailing their gorgeous fringes o'er the heights.
Under the dying splendours of the day,
Rolling around him from his frosty throne,
Ridged with red skies, his mighty kingdom lay
Stretching to heaven. Zone on sweeping zone,
Huge circles outward swirled without a bound,
The world's immense horizons ringed him round,
Receding, merging on until the whole
Creation on the pivot of his soul
Seemed to be wheeling: star on lonely star
Haloed him with its orbit from afar.
He was the axle of the wheel, the pole
Round which the galaxies and systems roll,
And from his being, making months and years
Issued the vast momentum of the spheres.
Those mighty rings seemed but the ripples
 flung
From his great soul in lofty triumph swung,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

An Aphrodite rising from the deep
Of old despairs. Matter's forlorn desire,
Through souls of men, in mighty deeds to leap,
Rose in his soul and crowned itself with fire.
And as the Night, serene and chaste and cold,
Down the faint air on starry pinions rolled,
Loud shouts of triumph through the valleys ran,
And Noah turned to watch, far in the west,
The sun's great phoenix fold her scarlet fan
And sink in ruin from the snowy crest.
There as amid the growing shades he stood
Facing alone the sky's vast solitude,
That space, which gods and demons fear to scan,
Smiled on the proud irreverence of Man.

Night is a Captain hustling up his stars,
Loud is the stumping of their boots of gold
Along the frosty horns and deep-cut scars
Of old bull-mountains sulking in the cold
Vacuums whereto they thrust their snouts to feel
Release from leaden pressures or to hear

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

The humming spokes that twinkle in the wheel
Of many a roving sun. Set in their sheer
Grey brows, the caved unasking eyes with dim
Secrets are slowly filled: wisdom undreamed
Makes heavier their pine-quilled heads where swim
Ponderous fancies: grooved in quartz and seamed
In slate, they pattern their tremendous schemes —
Dead lava scrawled with wrinkled epics: lust
Expressed in stony groins, where distant streams
Dash into puffs of dust
Or trail thin fibres down the slopes to break
And crinkle on the star-bright lake.

Though the dark sky has gathered stormy numbers
Of vultures to be snowed upon my corpse;
Though the weak arc of Heaven warps
Beneath the darkness that encumbers
The night beyond; though we believe the end
Is but the end, and that the torn flesh crumbles
And the fierce soul, rent from its temple, tumbles
Into the gloom where empty winds contend,

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

In gnat-like vortex droning — what is this
That makes us stamp upon the mountain-tops,
So fearless at the brink of the abyss,
Where into space the sharp rock-rampart drops
And bleak winds hiss?
It is the silent chanting of the soul:
“Though times shall change and stormy ages roll,
I am that ancient hunter of the plains
That raked the shaggy flitches of the Bison:
Pass, world: I am that dreamer that remains,
The Man, clear-cut against the last horizon! ”

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